

## **USDA Commemorates the 78<sup>th</sup> Birthday of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.**

USDA commemorated the 78<sup>th</sup> birthday of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. at a celebration held in USDA's Jefferson Auditorium in Washington, DC on January 11, 2007. USDA employees gather annually to pay tribute to Dr. King through programs that generate a spirit of unity and service, raise awareness of the important contributions made by Dr. King, and highlight the value that USDA places on diversity. This year's celebration was themed "In the Spirit of Unity and Service, Remember! Celebrate! Act!"

The ceremony opened with a welcome from Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights Margo M. McKay who reminded all in attendance that the ideals of unity and service were at the heart of much of what Dr. King stood for and of how Dr. King, in his famous "I Have A Dream" speech, paid tribute to the youth who took on such crucial and courageous roles in the civil rights movement.

USDA's 2007 program featured youth of USDA employees in an essay contest sponsored by the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights. Contest participants submitted essays addressing the relevance of Dr. King's writing, "Letter from Birmingham Jail" and his speech "I Have A Dream" to the world today. Contest winners, Daejonne Bennett, Tiffany M. Hodge, Joshua Crockett, and Christopher W. Hill, read their winning essays.

Alumni of the USDA 1890 National Scholars Program, Sterling August III and Tiffany Armstrong, were also featured at the ceremony and read excerpts from Dr. King's speech and letter. The USDA National 1890 Scholars Program is a USDA outreach program conducted in partnership with Historically Black 1890 Land Grant Colleges and Universities. Mr. August and Ms. Armstrong joined the USDA workforce as permanent employees after their graduation.